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# What you should know about fertilizing a lawn

Shortly after buying a home, many first-time homeowners recognize how challenging it can be to maintain a property. Many embrace that challenge and refashion their homes to reflect their personalities, interests and tastes.

First-time homeowners may direct the bulk of their attention to decorating the interiors of their homes upon moving in, but the work extends outside as well. Tending to a lawn is a responsibility worth taking seriously, as the American Society of Landscape Architects reports a well-groomed landscape can increase resale value by anywhere from 15 to 20 percent. First-time homeowners may not be thinking about resale value, but it's never too early to prioritize lawn care, which should include routine fertilization. Fertilizing can ensure a lawn grows in lush, green and healthy, but first-time homeowners may want to know a few things prior to taking a spreader for a spin for the first time.

## • Identify what the lawn needs before purchasing fertilizer.

No two lawns are the same, and that's something to keep in mind when shopping for fertilizer. Even

neighboring properties may have different soil needs, so it's imperative that homeowners identify any nutrient deficiencies prior to fertilizing. A simple, inexpensive soil test can reveal what a lawn needs, and such results can help homeowners pick the right fertilizer for their properties.

## • Get a handle on nitrogen needs.

First-time homeowners will undoubtedly come across fertilizers promising to address nitrogen needs in a lawn, but it's important to avoid over-fertilizing with nitrogen. Nitrogen is absorbed quickly, particularly when homeowners remember to water each day after fertilizing. So it's easy to add too much nitrogen, which can lead to the development of thatch that ultimately blocks sunlight, nutrients and water, thus leading to weaker roots and a lawn that looks nothing like the lush, green carpet homeowners are aiming for. Homeowners concerned about overdoing it with nitrogen can utilize a slow-release fertilizer that gives the lawn time to absorb nutrients and break them down.

## • Apply evenly.

Even application is an important component of successful fertiliz-

ing. Many find it easier to apply fertilizer evenly when using a spreader with a granule fertilization product. Spray fertilizers can work as well, but first-timers may find it difficult to apply products evenly when spraying. When using a spreader, read fertilizing packaging instructions carefully to ensure the spreader is on the right setting when starting. If the setting is not correct, you may end up spreading too much or too little fertilizer.

## • Fertilize more than once.

The lawn care experts at Lawn Doctor® note that strategic applications across the seasons will increase the chances a lawn comes in lush and green. Fertilizing more than once between spring and fall is a necessity no matter which type of grass is in the yard, but the timing may vary depending on grass type and local climate. Consult with a local lawn care professional to determine when and how often to fertilize.

Fertilizing a lawn can produce a home exterior homeowners can be proud of, even if they have little or no experience with lawn maintenance.



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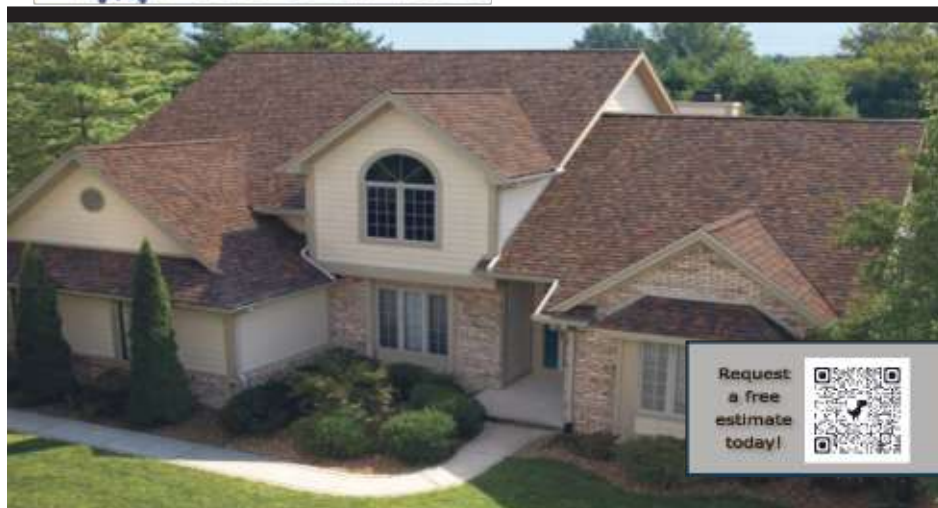


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# The benefits of lighting up your landscape

Homeowners know there's no shortage of ways to tweak a property. Some homeowners may lament that the work associated with home ownership is never done, but owning a house also provide endless opportunities to upgrade the spaces people call home.

Landscape lighting has become increasingly popular in recent years. That popularity is undoubtedly due to a number of variables, and each highlights a benefit of installing landscape lighting around a property.

• **Affordability:** Some may think of big budget projects like kitchen remodels or room additions when pondering home renovations. Such projects can have a dramatic impact on the look and feel of a home, but landscape lighting can be equally transformative at a fraction of the cost of larger undertakings. The home renovation experts at Angi.com estimate the average landscape lighting project costs around \$4,000, making affordability a notable benefit of the project.

• **Appearance:** There's no denying the aesthetic appeal of a well-lit landscape at night. Landscape lighting can be utilized to draw attention to awe-inspiring components of a

landscape, whether it's natural features like gardens and foliage or manmade components like architectural features. Improved appearance can increase curb appeal, which is often associated with how a home looks during daylight hours. But photographs of a well-lit nighttime landscape can impress buyers as well.

• **Cost savings:** Landscape lighting might help homeowners reduce the cost of their homeowners insurance. Researchers at PolicyGenius.com found that insurance companies typically offer a discount of 2 to 5 percent to homeowners who install a home security system. Insurance providers may offer additional savings to homeowners who pair such systems with landscape lighting, which can be a deterrent to burglars who prefer to operate under a cloak of darkness.

• **Safety:** Insurance firms may discount premiums because of landscape lighting because they view it as a deterrent to potential criminals. But landscape lighting also makes moving around a property at night safer for residents and guests. Lighting can be used to illuminate walkways, outdoor living rooms, patios around pools, and other areas where residents and guests



will be walking at night, which can reduce the risk of falls and injuries that may result from such spills.

• **ROI:** Savvy homeowners consider a renovation's return on investment before deciding to go forward with a project. Studies vary, but the National Association of Realtors indicates landscape lighting can recoup as much as 70 percent of homeowners'

investment in the project at resale. When viewed through the lens of ROI, the cost of installing landscape lighting is even less.

Landscape lighting adds notable aesthetic appeal to a home at a fraction of the cost of other renovation projects. The benefits such lighting provides make the project one every homeowner can consider.

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# Drought-resistant plants and trees

A beautiful landscape adds considerable aesthetic appeal to a property and an awe-inspiring lawn and garden can greatly improve resale value. In fact, the American Society of Landscape Architects claims landscaping can increase a home's resale value by as much as 20 percent, a contention that supports the notion that a lush landscape is something buyers want and are willing to pay for.

Maintaining a lush landscape is no small task, but that job is notably easier when homeowners pick the right plants. The right plant for a property depends on where a home is located, but it's worth noting that drought-resistant plants and trees may be especially worthy investments. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 54

percent of the contiguous United States experienced moderate or exceptional drought over the first 10 months of 2024. The NASA Earth Observatory notes that even the southeastern United States, where Hurricane Helene struck and dropped considerable rainfall in the final days of September, was affected by drought, experiencing no precipitation in the month after that devastating storm struck.

When planning a landscape renovation, homeowners must take variables such as climate into consideration, particularly if their end goal is a lush, awe-inspiring lawn and garden. With that in mind, the following are some drought-resistant plants and trees homeowners may want to consider adding to their landscapes.

## Trees

The National Arbor Day Foundation notes that drought-tolerant trees are ideal as summer temperatures rise in many parts of the world. Drought-tolerant trees can survive in dry conditions, and they also provide great shade that allows people to enjoy their yards even when temperatures rise. The ADF notes that the following are some drought-resistant trees homeowners can consider:

- Eastern redcedar
- Bur oak
- Northern red oak
- Kentucky coffeetree
- Hackberry
- Scots pine
- Northern catalpa
- London planetree
- Shumard oak
- Live oak

## Plants

Trees add ample aesthetic appeal to a property, but colorful plants

also help to create a stunning setting. Homeowners concerned about drought can consider these plants that various garden experts note are tolerant of dry conditions.

- Aster
- Beardtongue
- Black-eyed Susan
- Bugleweed
- Catmint
- Lantana
- Lavender
- Purple coneflower
- Russian sage
- Stonecrop

Homeowners are urged to work with local lawn and garden professionals when picking trees and plants for their properties. Such individuals can provide insight about species that are accustomed to local conditions and capable of thriving in them even when precipitation is low.



Garrett has been involved in his family's landscape business for over forty years, alongside his older brother Bill, who is a certified EP Henry dealer and hardscape installer. In 1992 he graduated from Temple University with a BS in Landscape Architecture with an emphasis on naturalistic landscape design. He immediately began working for Petritsch Lawns and Landscaping as a designer and crew foreman of their landscape division. Honing his skills from working on various projects, his affinity for natural products expanded, often incorporating boulders, flagstone, native plants, etc. With an increased interest in horticulture, he received a PCH (PA Certified Horticulturist) from Penn State University and later an SLC (Sustainable Landscape Certificate).

In 2021 Garrett's parents, Henry and Diane, retired after serving the community for many years. Inspired by their parents' hard work and dedication, both Bill and Garrett started their own businesses. Bill is the proprietor of WH Enterprises, focusing on hardscaping, excavating and has a location where he sells stone & mulch products. Garrett owns and operates Petritsch Landscaping and Garden Center where you can find a large variety of both ornamental and native trees, shrubs and perennials. Whether updating your garden or starting with a clean slate, choosing a traditional landscape or taking a naturalistic approach employing native plant and construction materials,

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# A rundown on scarifying

To those unfamiliar with lawn maintenance, the term “scarify” might sound like something horror movie directors hope to do to audiences who watch their films. But scarifying has nothing to do with frightening filmgoers, and everything to do with promoting a lush, green and healthy lawn.

## What does it mean to scarify a lawn?

Scarifying a lawn involves the utilization of a scarifier to remove dead organic matter that can build up on a lawn over time. When such thatch develops and settles in on a lawn, it can hinder growth by blocking water and nutrients from reaching the soil. Scarifying with a scarifier, or a rake in a smaller lawn or one where thatch buildup is not significant, can help to ensure a lawn can benefit



from water and nutrients, such as those which are of-

ten found in fertilizers.

## Is a scarifier necessary?

Lawn and garden tools make yard work easier, and a scarifier is no exception. Scarifiers range in price, but many effective machines are rela-

tively inexpensive when compared to more costly machines like lawn mowers and aerators. While a scarifier certainly can make dethatching easier, some homeowners might be able to get by with a spring-tined rake. Howev-

er, it's less labor-intensive to forgo a rake and use a scarifier on larger properties.

## Are there additional reasons to scarify?

Thatch buildup also can promote the growth of moss, so scarifying can decrease the chances that healthy grass is pushed to the side by sponge-like moss that can quickly overtake a property.

## Is there anything I should know about scarifying?

A lawn that has never before been scarified is likely to produce a substantial amount of thatch, which can be made up of old grass clippings, leaves and moss. Though many scarifiers come with attachable buckets that collect the thatch, such baskets tend to be rather small and fill up quickly, forcing frequent stopping that can add a considerable amount of time to the job. If possible, homeowners with lawns that have significant thatch buildup might want to scarify without the bucket attached. Doing so will leave lots of piles of dead organic matter strewn about the yard, but the job is likely to go more quickly if those heaps are gathered up with a rake after scarifying and then discarded. Constant stopping to empty a small bucket filled with thatch will compromise efficiency and that can be frustrating.

Homeowners also should not expect their lawns to stun after a scarifying session. The lawn will likely look worse, but

See **RUNDOWN** on Page 7

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# RUNDOWN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

that's only temporary. Once the dethatched lawn gets some water and fertilizer, the soil beneath will be more ready to receive them, and the lawn will soon look much better.

## Are all scarifiers the same?

Homeowners are urged to do their homework and read product reviews before choosing a scarifier. The majority of scarifiers now on the market are electric, so homeowners will need the ability to plug into a power source when using such products. They also will need to negotiate around the cord, which should be a lengthy extension designed for outdoor use. Homeowners with particularly large properties may want to purchase a gas-powered scarifier, but

such products are harder to come by than their electric counterparts, and could be considerably more expensive as well.

## When should I scarify?

Various lawn professionals recommend scarifying a lawn at least once per year, and springtime

is a popular season to do so. Scarify prior to an initial fertilizer application so that does not block the lawn from getting the nutrients in the fertilizer. A second scarifying session may be necessary in fall.

Scarifying can be an important step in creating a stunning and healthy lawn.



## As the weather warms up, consider these tips to help bring a garden back to life.

- Discard the dead weight. Winter can take its toll on a garden, even in regions where the weather between December and early spring is not especially harsh. Discard dead plants that have lingered into spring and prune any perennials that need it. Branches that fell during winter storms also should be removed at this point if they have not previously been discarded.
- Test the soil. Soil testing kits can be purchased at local garden centers and home improvement retailers. Such tests are inexpensive and can reveal if the soil needs to be amended to help plants thrive in the months to come.
- Mulch garden beds. Mulching benefits a garden by helping soil retain moisture and preventing the growth of weeds. Various garden experts note that mulching in spring can prevent weed seeds from germinating over the course of spring and summer. That means plants won't have to fight with weeds for water when the temperature warms up. It also means gardeners won't have to spend time pulling weeds this summer.

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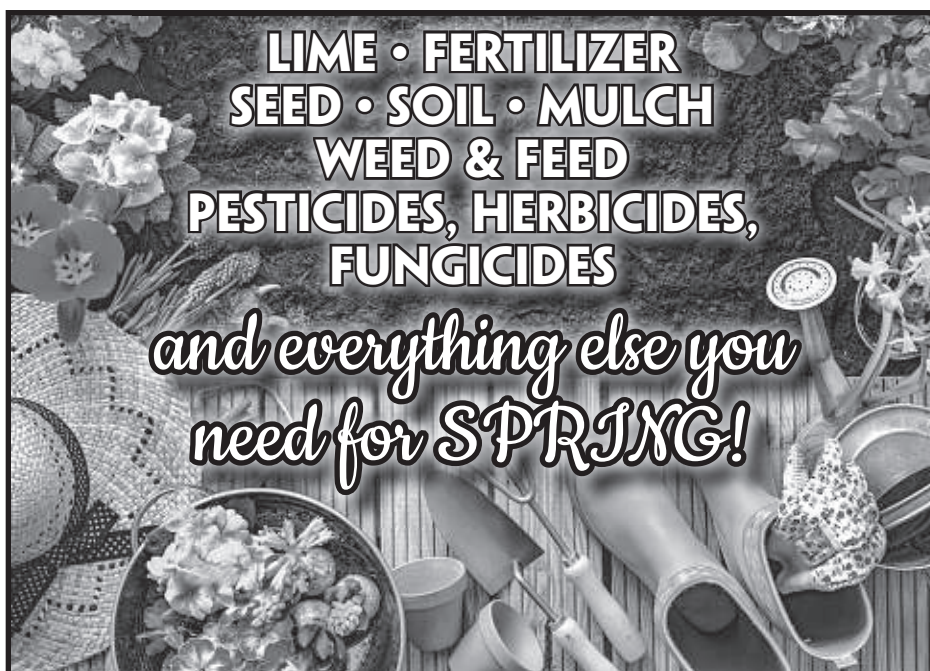
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# The basics of basement conversion projects

Space is a sought-after commodity in real estate. Buyers prioritize numerous variables when searching for a new home, and square footage is often near the top of their lists.

The real estate market has been highly competitive in recent years, and home prices have remained high as a result. That reality has prompted some current homeowners who feel they have outgrown their homes to look for ways to increase the usable space in their existing properties. Basement conversions are one way to add more space. Homeowners mulling a basement conversion project can learn the basics of the project as they try to determine if such renovations are right for them.

## • Basement conversion projects can be costly.

Though the final cost of a conversion project can vary widely depending on the condition and accessibility of the existing space, estimates range from around \$45,000 to as much as \$150,000. The home renovation experts at Angi.com note that the average price for excavation is \$37,000. Of course, homeowners who are simply hoping to repurpose an existing basement likely won't need to pay for excavation. Accessibility is another notable variable that can affect the final cost. If the current space is a crawl space, potentially costly structural changes may be necessary to ensure contractors and eventually residents can access the area. Basements that

are already easily accessible won't require such expenditures.

## • Ventilation is a must.

Finished basements must be adequately ventilated so moisture can be controlled. Without sufficient ventilation, the damp conditions common in many basements can foster the growth of mold. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America notes that inhaled mold spores can trigger allergic reactions in some people, potentially leading to runny nose, postnasal drip, red and watery eyes, and itchy eyes, nose, ears, and mouth, among other symptoms. Waterproofing systems and adequate ventilation can prevent mold growth in a basement, and these should be integral components of the design.

## • Permits are part of the process.

Basement conversions are considered major projects, and thus typically require homeowners and contractors to secure



permits before any work is done. Permits may be necessary at various stages of the project. Homeowners who ignore laws regarding permits will have trouble selling their homes down the road, as it can be difficult if not

impossible to secure a certificate of occupancy if renovations were made without securing the proper permits. In addition, securing necessary permits for each phase of the project can ensure final approval of the project. If permits are not secured along the way, local officials may insist work be redone to adhere to local laws, which can make the project even more costly.

## • Basement conversions take time.

The time a project takes will depend on the condition of the space at the start of the project and various details unique

to each conversion. However, various contractors indicate projects take about two to three months once they begin. That timeline does not include the pre-project process of finding a contractor, soliciting design plans or preparing the rest of the home for such a significant and lengthy undertaking.

Basement conversion projects can add significant square footage to a home. Recognition of what such projects entail can help homeowners decide if this is the best way for them to increase livable space in their homes.



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# Attract winged friends with these bird feeders

Birds are beautiful creatures that can make a lawn and garden feel even more serene. Providing snacks to supplement what birds naturally find in the wild guarantees up close and personal interactions with the scores of species that call neighborhoods home.

Bird feeders are particularly important in colder climates and during winter-time when food may be scarce. Keeping birds well fed helps them survive over winter and continue to repopulate in the spring. Bird feeding isn't all for the birds, either. Ashley Dayer, an associate professor in the Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation at Virginia Tech, argues that feeding birds also is a benefit to humans because it stimulates compassion for the animals.

The type of bird feeder a person places in the yard determines which species may be drawn to the property. The following are various types of feeders to consider.

## Suet feeders

Suet cakes are high-energy food sources that attract birds like woodpeckers and nuthatches. They are particularly beneficial in colder months or regions where birds need extra fat for energy. These cage-like feeders snap around the rectangular suet cake and hang from a pole or tree.

## Ground feeder

Ground feeders are simple screen-bottomed trays that sit several inches off of the ground or on a deck to help keep seeds and grain from coming in contact with droppings. Ground feeders are a favorite of juncos, sparrows, gold-

finches, and cardinals, among others.

## Sugar water feeder

These feeders come in different shapes, from tubes to round dishes, and are magnets to hummingbirds. They typically have red coloring to be more attractive to those high-speed flyers.

## Nyjer bird feeder

Small birds like goldfinches love to dine on nyjer seeds, which are tiny, black thistle seeds. These feeders are tube-shaped mesh socks designed to hold this specific seed. The small feeding ports prevent seed waste and cater to the small beaks of finches.

## Hopper bird feeder

These are the feeders many people think of when they envision bird feeders. Hopper bird feeders hold a large amount of seed and often have a roof or a design that mimics a house or barn. The covered design helps to keep seeds dry and might be the best hanging feeder for people who live in areas with a lot of rain. Hoppers will attract blue jays, grackles, cardinals, and

blackbirds.

## Tube feeders

Tube feeders will attract an array of birds. They are cylindrical in shape with various ports to enable birds to perch and feed.

Window and smart bird feeders

These types of bird feeders attach to windows to allow homeowners to view the birds up close. Smart varieties have cameras on the feeders that will send a feed via an app to a smart phone or computer. Some even may identify the bird species on the feeder at any given point in time.

Bird feeders provide enjoyment for bird watchers and nutritious food various species.



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# Home interior trends on the rise

Trends that seem ubiquitous one day can seemingly vanish before the sun rises again just 24 hours later. That's especially true in the digital age, when overnight celebrities and viral videos can be on the tips of everyone's tongue before being forgotten entirely when the next online sensation emerges in an increasingly rapid news cycle.

Home trends typically benefit from a longer shelf life than viral videos and other fads that originate on the internet, and that's something renovation-minded homeowners should consider when improving their homes. Homeowners preparing to do just that can consider these notable trends,

which the online renovation experts at Houzz suggest will be particularly popular in the year ahead.

• **Rounded furnishings:** Houzz noted that gentle curves and rounded edges embody the organic modern styles that many current homeowners love. Rounded dining tables and similarly circular coffee tables may merit consideration among homeowners who want to embrace popular trends.

• **Arches:** Houzz cites arches among the more popular modern trends, and the experts at Better Homes & Gardens note this unique, eye-catching style has been gaining popularity for several years. Better Homes & Gardens

suggests that part of the appeal of arched doorways could be their deviation from a more traditional door shape. That uniqueness draws the attention of residents and visitors alike, and Houzz notes that arched windows, cabinets and even millwork details are part of the pivot toward arches.

• **Stove alcoves:**

If it's a touch of history homeowners want, kitchen range alcoves might be just the project for them. Range alcoves call an earlier time to mind when wood burning stoves were commonplace. The report from Houzz notes range alcoves immediately draw attention, which undoubtedly adds to their appeal.



• **Wood for warmth:** Homeowners who hear "wood and warmth" might think fireplaces, but Houzz reports that wood elements are being incorporated into interior designs as a means to giving homes

a more cozy vibe. Ceiling beams, trim, wall paneling, and cabinetry are utilizing wood to add warmth to a home. Trends come and go, but home trends typically have more staying power than styles that

emerge in other arenas. Homeowners who want to upgrade their home interiors can consider the latest trends and choose those that align with their own personal tastes.



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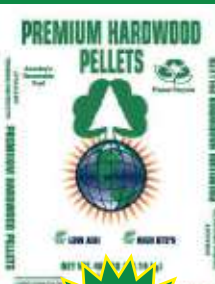
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# Soak up these luxurious bathroom features

Kitchens and bathrooms are two popular areas to address when renovating a home. Modernize Home Services says 26 percent of sellers make bathroom improvements to their homes before listing. Midscale bath remodels will net a return on investment of about 64 percent, while a luxury bathroom overhaul has an ROI of about 57 percent.

When considering bathroom renovations, homeowners may want to include some unique features that can add style and function, not to mention some much-deserved luxury. With that in mind, the following are some luxurious features to consider.

• **Heated floors:** There is something to be said for stepping out of the shower and being

met with warmth underfoot. Heated floors are not just for people who live in cold climates, either. When the air conditioning is pumping on hot days, tile floors can feel chilly. Heated floors also are aesthetically appealing because homeowners don't have to factor in baseboard heaters or forced-air vents.

• **Steam showers:** There are many different steam showers on the market, and each can turn regular showers into steamy spa-like enclaves. A steam shower is similar to a sauna and utilizes a steam generator to produce steam in a single area, advises Badeloft® Luxury Bathrooms.

• **Soaking tub:** Although the majority of people shower as part of their daily hygiene rou-

tine, a deep soaking tub separate from the shower is ideal for those who enjoy a good bath.

• **Luxury mirror:** Upgrading the bathroom mirror to one that offers features like defoggers, integrated lighting and a dimmer setting can elevate the bathroom.

• **Floating vanity:** A floating vanity is mounted directly to the wall to leave space underneath. Better Homes & Gardens says a floating vanity can lend an airy feel to a bathroom.

• **Frameless shower:** A frameless (glass) shower door is not only luxurious but also functional for people who want to age in place. With no edge or lip to step over to enter the shower, anyone with mobility challenges can walk into a frameless

shower safely.

## • Water closet:

If space allows, separating the toilet in a water closet from the rest of the bathroom space affords even more privacy. Plus, in couple's bathrooms, a water closet enables two to use the bathroom at the same time for different functions.

## • Walk-in-closet:

Relocating the bedroom closet to right off the owner's bathroom affords an immediate opportunity to dress comfortably, thus streamlining a morning routine.

Bathroom renovations are worthwhile investments. Choosing some unique upgrades can enhance the design and function of these important spaces.



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# How to organize a home's interior

The dawn of a new year marks a convenient time to turn over a new leaf. Much attention is paid to individuals' intentions to eat healthier and exercise more at the start of a new year, but those goals are not the only ways to embrace positive change come January.

A quick look around a home's interior may lead some to conclude that their home environments could benefit from a little less clutter and some improved organization. A more organized home may be easier to navigate and can even have a positive impact on residents' mental health. In fact, a 2021 study published in the journal *Comprehensive Psychoneuroendocrinology* found that women who cared for infants in cluttered homes experienced higher levels of physical stress than those whose homes were more organized. That study suggests an organized

home is a less stressful environment, which itself can pay numerous dividends, as the Mayo Clinic notes chronic stress increases a person's risk for various health problems, including anxiety, depression, digestive issues, heart disease, and weight gain, among others.

With so much to gain from an organized home, individuals can consider these strategies to make interior spaces around the house less cluttered.

• **Avoid procrastinating.** A weekly, if not daily, routine that involves cleaning up spaces like the kitchen and living room can ensure a home is not overtaken by clutter before residents even realize it. Each day, go through the mail and discard papers like grocery store circulars and junk mail so they don't pile up. Parents of school-aged children can organize papers



kids return home with each day so all that homework and event announcements does not create clutter.

• **Purchase an entryway shoe rack.** It might seem simple, but an entryway shoe rack can set an organized tone in a home.

Whether the primary entryway is through the front door or a side door, a shoe rack just inside the door can ensure shoes are not strewn about and reduces the chances that floors are muddled.

• **Consider furniture**

**that doubles as storage.** Many people utilize storage furniture so common spaces like living rooms are not overwhelmed by clutter. For example, a storage ottoman can hold blankets, pillows and other creature comforts so these rooms project

a clutter-free vibe when not in use. Similarly, storage benches at the end of beds in each bedroom can help to establish a serene, clutter-free vibe, which can promote a better night's sleep.

• **Discard older items.** Clutter can pile up when storage areas like closets, dressers, nightstands, and home offices fill up with items people tend to accumulate over the years. For example, a linen closet can be overrun by bath towels that are rarely used, while nightstands can become junk drawers over the years. Periodically go through these areas and discard older items that are no longer used. These tasks won't take long, but can free up ample space throughout the home.

These are just a handful of the many ways individuals can effectively organize their home interiors and reap all the rewards that such efforts produce.

## Spills and Spotting Tips

- **Latex Paint:** Soak with dish detergent diluted with 20 parts water. Agitate the area, blot, rinse and blot again.
- **Mustard Spots:** Soak stained area with diluted ammonia (one tablespoon ammonia, one cup of water.) Then dry with a hairdryer.
- **Ball Point Ink:** Use hair spray and be sure to rinse the entire area well with water when finished.
- **Red Wine:** Use club soda to flush the wine from carpet fibers.
- **Blood Spots:** Flush with cold water. Avoid hot water as heat will set the blood stain.
- **Soft Drinks:** Blot the area with a vinegar solution (one part vinegar, two parts water.) Then blot with a detergent solution (one teaspoon detergent, one quart water.)
- **Gum:** Freeze the gum with ice and use a dull knife to remove.
- **Candle Wax:** Put a brown paper bag over the dried wax and run a hot iron over it. The bag will absorb the hot wax.
- **Grease and Oil Marks:** Gently rub in talcum powder, cornmeal or cornstarch. Let it set and then brush or sponge powder away. Vacuum the area.
- **Pet Urine:** Dampen area with equal parts white vinegar and water. Then blot dry.

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# Remedies for common electrical problems

Electricity is a modern convenience that's easily taken for granted until homes are plunged into darkness during power outages. Thomas Edison introduced electricity to the world in the late nineteenth century. After Edison's home received a private electric system, the first American home to be powered by hydroelectricity was in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1882. Despite that, just 50 percent all homes in the United States had electricity by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Electricity is now a standard home feature. And when something goes awry with a home's electrical components, homeowners may need to act fast to restore things to proper working order. Certain electrical problems are common in residential homes. Even homeowners with do-it-yourself skills should bring in an experienced electrician when their homes develop electrical problems, as electricity is nothing for novices to play with. Here's what to look for and how to remedy common issues, courtesy of East-West Electric, Inc., Safe and Sound Electric LLC, and American Home Shield.

## • **Flickering lights:**

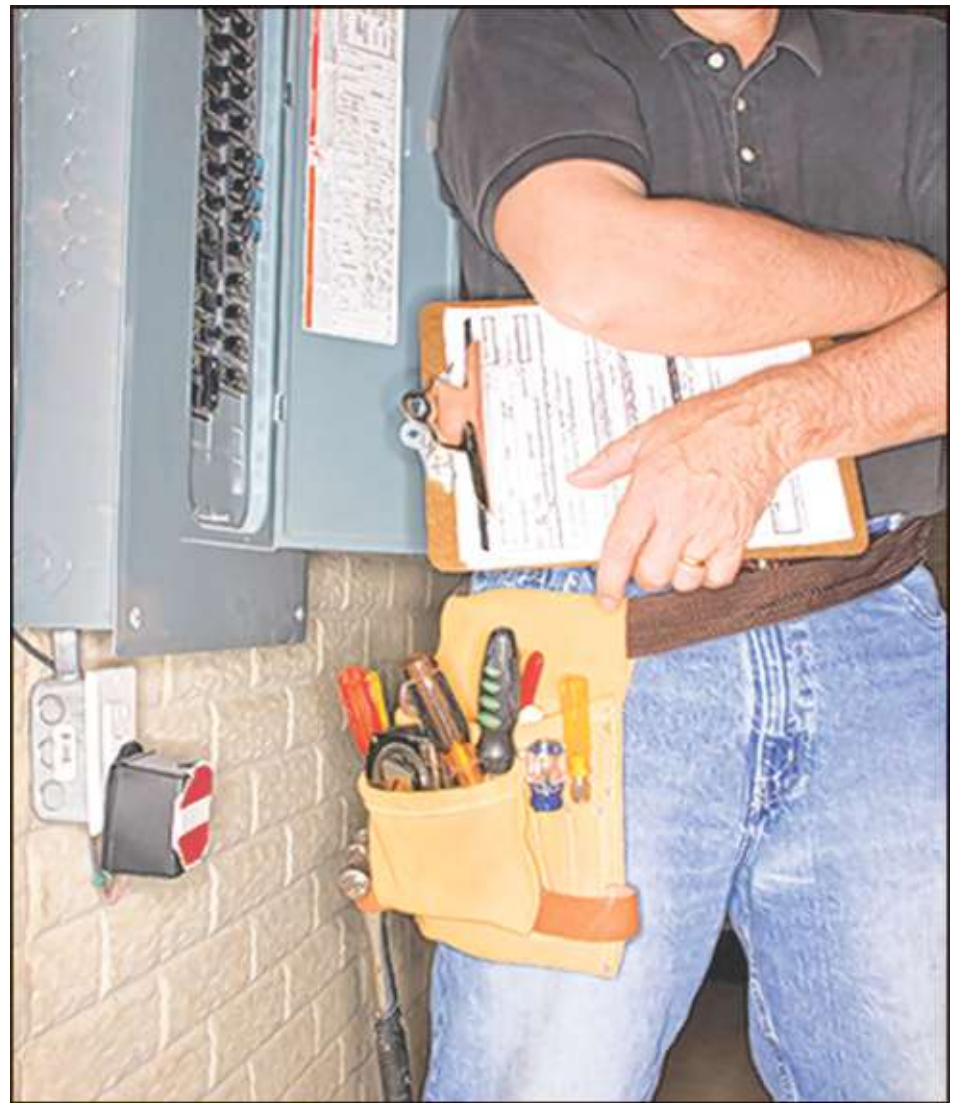
Flickering lights merit attention. While lights can flicker when bulbs are not screwed in tightly, this also could be a sign of a faulty connection that is creating arcing and overheating. A failure to address flickering lights might lead to a fire. An electrician can inspect wiring and fixtures to see where the problem may lie, and replace any necessary components.

• **Degraded electrical wiring:** Older homes may have aging electrical wiring that is worn out in places. This can cause arc faults, which occur when an electrical current veers off its intended path. Arc faults can cause electrical fires. Installing arc-fault circuit interrupters on the circuit panel can help. Traditional circuit breakers only trip with overloads and short circuits. AFCIs continuously monitor flow and will only trip during unwanted arcing conditions.

• **Insufficient power:** Those who reside in older homes might experience insufficient electrical power. Electrical grids homes are built using the technology of that time and may not be capable of handling the many devices that homeowners plug in today. Circuits may trip often when one or more electrical devices are used on the same circuit. The only way to remedy this issue is to replace the existing electrical system with a restructured one that can handle the supply of power.

• **Buzzing sounds:** Electrical outlets and switches in a home should always operate silently. Buzzing or unusual sounds heard near switches and outlets indicates there is a problem. Turn off the power to that fixture and consult a professional electrician to see what might be the issue.

• **Warmth around light fixtures:** Hot ceiling lights or other lights could mean that a homeowner is exceeding the recommended bulb wattages for that fixture. Check the



bulbs, and consider switching to compact fluorescent or LED bulbs that do not produce as much heat as incandescent bulbs.

• **Higher energy bills:** Energy bills can spike for a number of reasons. Outdated electrical devices that draw a lot of power or a leakage

in the system are two potential causes of higher energy bills. Homeowners can call an electrician to assess the energy efficiency of a home and suggest changes.

Electrical problems might be common, but they should be dealt with promptly for safety's sake.

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# Wise watering strategies to help a lawn thrive

A number of factors can affect how well a garden or lawn takes root. Watering is a key element of any landscape care strategy, and one that homeowners should educate themselves about if they want to maintain a lush, healthy lawn throughout spring and summer.

Homeowners hoping to keep their lawns lush and green throughout summer can learn some effective watering strategies to achieve that goal.

## Check the irrigation system

Water Sense®, an EPA Partnership Program, advises following four steps at the start of spring: inspect, connect, direct, and select for clock timer-controlled irrigation systems. Make sure the system doesn't have any clogged, broken or missing sprinkler heads. Examine points where the sprinkler heads attach to pipes or hoses to make sure there are no leaks. The EPA says even a leak as small as the tip of a pen can waste 6,300 gallons of water per month. Adjust the sprinkler heads so that they only hit

the landscape elements rather than sidewalks or driveways. Align the watering schedule with the seasons.

## Invest in an impact sprinkler

An impact sprinkler on a tripod can be an effective option for those without built-in irrigation systems. These sprinklers rotate in circles to help deliver an even spray of water that mimics rainfall. It's easy to adjust their spray pattern and a sprinkler on a tripod can spray over the top of bushes and flower gardens.

## Drip irrigation systems are superior

According to Rainbird.com, drip irrigation tubing and emitters slowly distribute water to the right spots of a landscape. They can be placed at ground level or buried underground. Water soaks directly to the roots, minimizing water loss from runoff and evaporation. Some research suggests drip irrigation can effectively cover 25 percent more area than the average sprinkler system. It also tends to deliver more than 95 percent water efficiency.



## Skip the schedule

Watering a lawn or garden should not be ruled by a schedule, but other factors that will determine when water is needed, suggests Family Handyman. Daytime temperatures, wind conditions, soil type, lawn type, and recent rainfall will determine how much water the landscape really needs. Overwatering can be just as bad as underwatering. For those with underground watering systems, water sensors can trigger the system to turn on rather than a time on a clock.

## Avoid midday watering

The sun is hottest in the middle of the day. Watering during this time means that much of the water will be lost to evaporation before it can get to thirsty lawns and plants.

It pays to be smart about watering. Homeowners also can consider rain collection barrels to offset municipal or well water usage and be more eco-conscious about their watering efforts.

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The two families began working together in the 1980s. Their shared commitments to faith and family, along with their passion for providing quality plants made them natural partners.

In 2024, Bob and Melanie Herr; 4th generation owners, purchased Dan Schantz Greenhouse and Cut Flower Outlet in Allentown. It was just too exciting and opportunity to pass up! Since then, Bob and Melanie have poured their hearts into resurrecting the Lehigh Valley's favorite garden center. They have completed numerous upgrades and improvements while continuing to offer the best quality flowers in Pennsylvania.

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Wood Naturally specializes in a diverse range of outdoor structures, including sheds, garages, greenhouses, pool houses, home office buildings, gazebos, pergolas, pavilions, horse barns, and chicken coops. All products are fully customizable, and Vanessa takes pride in designing unique and innovative buildings tailored to each customer's needs. The company

also offers site preparation services, including concrete foundations, making it a true one-stop shop for outdoor solutions.

More than just a business, Wood Naturally is a family tradition rooted in craftsmanship, trust, and community care. With decades of experience, the team is dedicated to helping homeowners create functional and beautiful outdoor spaces.

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# How to establish a peaceful backyard retreat

Backyards have undergone quite a transformation over the last decade-plus. The days when patios and decks were all a backyard living space had to offer are largely a thing of the past, as homeowners have realized just how valuable it can be to commit to a stunning backyard.

The real estate experts at Zillow estimate that homes with backyard features such as outdoor televisions, outdoor showers and outdoor kitchens command 3.1 percent more than expected upon reaching the market. If 3.1 percent doesn't sound like a lot, it actually equates to nearly \$11,000 on a typical home. But there's more to gain than money when converting a backyard space into a relaxing respite. Such spaces can provide a welcoming escape from the hustle and bustle of daily life, all the while giving homeowners and residents a comfortable space to soak in the great outdoors. With that in mind, homeowners can take the following steps to establish a peaceful backyard retreat.

## • Refresh the landscape.

Even if your vision is centered on outdoor furniture and a space that accommodates movie nights under the stars, it's still best to refresh the existing landscape if it needs a little upkeep. Overgrown trees, hedges and bushes can create



the same cluttered vibe that dominates interior spaces overrun with items. If necessary, work with a local tree service or landscape architect to trim, or even remove, trees and hedges that are crowding the backyard and making it feel claustrophobic or giving it an unkempt look. Aim for a landscape that affords a balance of sun and shade so the space is as comfortable as possible throughout the day.

• **Set up multiple gathering spaces, if possible.** Once a backyard retreat is established, everyone who calls the property home might find the space hard to resist. Keep this in mind when planning the space and aim to set up multiple gathering spaces. An outdoor kitchen

with a nearby dinner table can be a great space to enjoy al fresco dining, but a separate area to read a book or watch a movie or ballgame can make the space more versatile. Some may want to relax away from the noise of the grill area, and multiple gathering spaces ensures there's always a peaceful spot to unwind out back.

## • Add a water feature.

Running water has a way of calming the nerves, and that's good to keep in mind when planning a backyard retreat. Water features run the gamut from garden ponds to koi ponds to fountains to hot tubs. Homeowners can identify which feature best aligns with their idea of relaxation and then work with a landscape architect to ensure it's installed in their backyard oasis.

## • Don't forget shade.

Temperatures are rising in many areas of the globe, and that's worth noting when planning a backyard retreat. Even the most ardent sun worshippers likely won't want to be exposed to the sun at all times when relaxing in their backyards. Strategically chosen means of providing shade can make spaces enjoyable all day long. Consider umbrellas, gazebos, pergolas, and even retractable awnings to cover patios and decks when the sun is at its highest each afternoon. If you plan to spend ample time in the grass, make that more enjoyable by planting shade trees, which also can protect the grass from drought and make it more comfortable underfoot.

A relaxing backyard retreat can make for an ideal space to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life.



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# How to decide between a deck or pavers in an outdoor remodel

Outdoor living spaces have become sought-after commodities among homeowners. A 2022 survey of homeowners conducted by the New Home Trends Institute found that open yards are less appealing to home buyers than they once were. The survey noted that just 28 percent of respondents chose open yards, while 65 percent preferred patios and 55 percent chose decks. Green spaces remain popular, but the survey indicates that many would-be home buyers also want an outdoor living area to make the most of their home exteriors.

Homeowners aspiring to transform their home exterior spaces typically must decide between a deck or pavers when the time comes to plan such areas. That's a personal choice homeowners must make, but those without strong feelings on either option can consider these tips as they try to decide if a deck or pavers are for them.

• **Determine your budget.** Budget is a notable variable with any home renovation project, and the addition of an outdoor living space is no exception. The materials homeowners choose will ultimately determine the cost of each project. For example, composite decking materials tend to cost significantly more than wood decks, but that higher price tag also comes with less maintenance and

typically a longer life span. Pavers may prove less expensive than composite decking, but those cost savings may be negligible if a yard requires extensive excavation to prepare an area for a new patio. It requires patience, but gathering estimates of the various materials can serve as a good starting point when planning an outdoor living space. In addition, homeowners must recognize that material costs can fluctuate considerably over time, as such prices are often contingent on a range of variables, including supply chain issues. So it's best to gather estimates in a short period of time to make the most accurate price comparisons.

• **Identify your vision for the space.** Homeowners who have a vision for their outdoor living space, even if they are not sure about which material they prefer, may find the process goes more

quickly and even more smoothly than those who are unsure about what they want. Those who prefer a flexible multi-use space may be best going with pavers, as the spaces can be easily converted and areas simply designated as one might differentiate between rooms inside the home. For example, an outdoor living room can be separated with the installation of a pavilion and fireplace, while kitchen and dining areas can be separate spaces on the same patio. Decks tend to be less flexible, which might make them ideal for homeowners who prefer an outdoor dining area but don't need a more expansive entertaining space. Of course, decks can be as big as homeowners choose, which can make the spaces more multifunctional.

• **Recognize both may be in your best interest.** Homeowners



also should know that many outdoor living spaces feature both a deck and a paver patio. Homeowners may like an elevated deck that steps down to a patio, which can easily distinguish between the spaces and establish the

area as a multifunctional space.

Homeowners planning outdoor living space projects may find themselves

choosing between a deck and pavers. Each option can work, and homeowners may even want to combine the two.

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# Why hiring a painter is the right choice

Few home improvements can change the look of a room faster and more affordably than a painting makeover. In fact, homeowners often turn to paint before they make any other renovations. Home Light, a real estate technology company, says painting a home's interior can net a return on investment as high as 107 percent.

Although painting is a project that can be tackled by do-it-yourselfers, there are various advantages to calling in a professional to handle painting projects. Here is a look at some of the benefits to working with a professional painter.

### Cut down on the job time

A professional painter can reduce the project timeline. Painters have the skill set and experience to complete a project in a timely manner. This means the job will be streamlined from preparation to clean-up.

### Pay attention to details

Professional painters are likely to do a job that is nearly flawless, especially after homeowners exercise their due diligence and vet painters carefully. Professionals will pay attention to the small details that less experienced painters wouldn't think about.



### Reduce your workload

Painting can be a time-consuming job, and most of it occurs even before you pick up a brush. It can take hours to prep walls, patch holes, remove moldings, and apply painter's tape. Homeowners who do not have much time are better off leaving trusting the project to a professional.

### Painters already have equipment

Do-it-yourselfers may need to buy new tools before beginning the job. This means brushes, rollers, tape, tarps, trays, and much more. Unless you plan to paint multiple times, this can make stocking up a considerable investment. Professionals already have all the right gear and tools of the trade.

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### Lasting results

Professional painters understand which products will produce the desired results, depending on the wear and tear of the space. Paints are not all created equal, and certain walls, floors and trim may require unique priming and preparation that novices are not familiar with. Professional painters can help ensure durability and save homeowners from having to do the job again in a few months or years.

### A safer experience

Painting can be a challenging job when it involves painting hard-to-reach spaces and/or climbing and balancing on tall ladders. Homeowners are not at risk of injury when hiring a professional painter. In addition, professional painters should be licensed and insured. This means if an injury or incident occurs, the homeowner will not be on the hook for the cost.

A fresh coat of paint can produce amazing results. Leaving the work to a professional can ensure a job is done correctly and beautifully and completed on time.



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## Tips to make a living room a more comfortable, welcoming space



A kitchen is widely recognized as the most popular room in a home. Though it might be true that the hustle and bustle of home life runs through the kitchen, many a memory is made in the living room as well.

Living rooms tend to be go-to spaces for family movie nights, game watches with fellow fans and places to gather during holiday celebrations. That's a lot of quality time spent in the living room, and those moments can be more enjoyable if the space is as comfortable as possible. With that in mind, people can consider various ways to make living rooms more comfortable.

### • Prioritize comfort over aesthetics.

In an era of Instagram, it's easy to fall head over heels with images when designing a living room. Aesthetic appeal certainly has its place in a living room, but it's important to remember how much

living will be done in these rooms when designing them. Comfortable couches and furnishings like ottomans can make it easier to relax in the living room whether you're watching a movie, cheering on your favorite team or reading a book.

• Ensure there's ample seating. It can be hard to feel comfortable in cramped quarters whether you're welcoming friends and family into your home or simply lounging around on Sunday mornings. If comfort is your top priority, arrange the room so there's ample seating throughout and people don't feel like they're sitting on top of one another when spending time in the room.

• Consider neutral paint colors. Furnishings are not the only things that can affect how comfortable people feel in a living room. The home improvement experts at The Spruce note that neutral paint colors with

warm undertones help to establish a cozy feel in a living room. Various shades of white, beige, tan, or even gray can help to establish a warm, comfortable vibe in a living room.

• Incorporate the outdoors into the room. The great outdoors can have a calming effect on anyone, so it makes sense that incorporating the outdoors into a living room can make the space feel more comfortable. Furnish the room with plants and look for items with earth-toned furnishings to create a calm and comfortable vibe in the space. In addition, new windows that allow for more natural light and offer views into a yard can help lift spirits and make the room feel more comfortable.

A comfortable living room is a space where people will want to spend their time. A few simple strategies can help create an inviting and comfortable vibe in any living room.



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# How to find the right contractor for your next home renovation

Home renovations are significant undertakings. Though some projects require more sizable investments of time and money than others, all merit homeowners' attention and inspire some excitement when pondering the finished product.

A finished product tends to offer more appeal when the project is overseen and undertaken by a professional contractor. Small projects may be in the wheelhouse of skilled do-it-yourselfers, but most homeowners are best served leaving home renovations to the professionals. Finding the right contractor for a given job is of the utmost importance, and the following are some tips to help homeowners do just that.

## • Seek word-of-mouth recommendations.

Word-of-

mouth advertising has long been recognized as an invaluable tool to attract customers, and for good reason. A 2025 report on the state of the roofing industry provided by Roofing Contractor, the official publication for the International Roofing Expo®, found that 79 percent of homeowners identify word-of-mouth as the top way to find a roofing professional. Word-of-mouth is so valued because homeowners can ask friends or neighbors about their experiences with a given professional in a pressure-free setting. Word-of-mouth also can help homeowners cut down on the pool of potential contractor candidates, which is no small benefit in markets flooded with renovation professionals.

## • Secure multiple written estimates.

It can be time-consuming to speak to multiple contractors and secure written estimates from each one, but such legwork is well worth the effort if the end result is finding the right contractor. Secure multiple estimates even if the first one provided to you is below budget. Multiple estimates allow homeowners to compare what's included, and not included, in each one. Some contractors offering low estimates may not include materials costs or additional factors that will increase the price. Others may seem more expensive initially but may prove more affordable than competitors if their estimates include all of the costs associated with the project. Only a direct comparison of multiple estimates, which should include details specific to the project and

an itemized list of what will be provided and performed by the contractor, can give homeowners an idea of what they're paying for.

• **Stay local when possible.** Hiring local contractors is beneficial for a number of reasons. Hiring locals keeps money in the community and thus supports the local economy. And working with local contractors can make it easier for homeowners to keep lines of communication open. Many projects also require a little post-completion upkeep or even some tweaks, which is more easily accomplished when working with contractors based nearby. And finally, local contractors will be familiar with building codes and other details specific to a given town. That familiarity can ensure a project is done in



adherence to codes and not stalled by permit- or inspection-related delays.

• **Confirm their insurance.** Travelers Insurance urges homeowners to confirm a contractor is properly insured and bonded prior to signing a contract. Contractors should be willing to provide a certificate of insurance (COI) that indicates their provider, policy number and cover-

age limits. Travelers also notes homeowners can contact insurers directly to verify coverage and ensure the policy is current. Never hire a contractor who is uninsured or unwilling to provide proof of insurance.

Hiring a contractor to perform a home renovation may be a leap of faith, but homeowners can take steps to ensure they find the right professional for the job.



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- **Water at the right times of day.** Homeowners who water their lawns and gardens at the right time of day can help the planet and reduce their energy bills. Watering during the coolest times of the day means less water will be lost to evaporation, ensuring water-needy

soil will get all it needs to help lawns and gardens thrive. Early morning watering before the sun reaches its midday peak and/or evening watering as the sun is setting are typically great times to water lawns and gardens, rather than when temperatures are at their hottest.

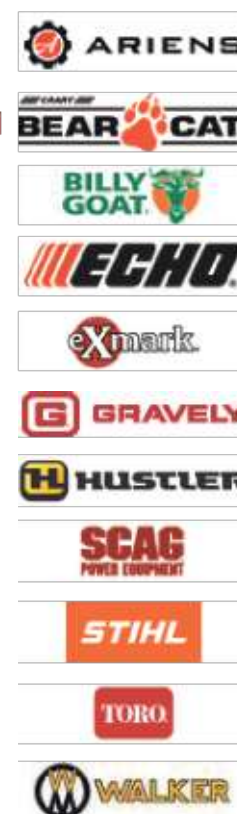
- **Use a rain barrel.** Rain barrels provide another great way to conserve water while tending to lawns and gardens. Rain barrels collect and store rain water from roofs and downspouts, keeping water from washing into sewage systems where it can't be put to good use. Water collected in rain barrels can be used in various ways. Many homeowners can use water from rain barrels to water their lawns, gardens and houseplants, saving money on their water bills along the way.



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# 4 signs of potential electrical hazards in a home

Homeowners know that the work of maintaining a home is never done. Cleaning is a daily task associated with homeownership, and such sessions can reveal more than dust buildup or dirty walls and surfaces.

When cleaning a home, homeowners can pull double duty and look for potentially hazardous situations. For example, vacuuming and dusting sessions can present a great opportunity to spot electrical hazards that might otherwise go unseen. With that in mind, homeowners can keep an eye out for these four signs of potential electrical hazards when working around the house.

**1. Tingling when touching an electrical appliance:** The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) advises homeowners to call a qualified electrician immediately if they experience a tingling feeling when touching an electrical appliance. The Electrical Safety Office notes experiencing a tingle or the feeling of being shocked is not normal. Homeowners who experience such a feeling should avoid the location and warn others in the home to do the same.

**2. Wall outlets that look or feel unusual:** Wall outlets do not garner much attention, as many are low enough to be out of sight or even behind furniture. So a cleaning session might be the only



time homeowners will notice issues with wall outlets. The NFPA notes discolored outlets or outlets that feel warm to the touch is a sign of an electrical problem. Various issues can cause outlets to look or feel unusual. An outlet could be short-circuiting or wires could be damaged, and each issue merits the attention of a qualified electrician.

**3. Foul odors:** An odor that calls to mind burning rubber is another indicator of an electrical problem. Various electrical experts indicate such odors can be indicative of damaged wiring, an overloaded circuit or loose connections, each of which poses a significant safety hazard. The NFPA

urges homeowners to contact a qualified electrician immediately if they sense a smell of burning rubber in their homes.

**4. Flickering lights:** Homeowners won't need to wait until cleaning sessions to notice flickering lights. Such flickering is hard to miss regardless of what residents are doing inside a home. Sometimes lights flicker because of a loose bulb, so homeowners who notice flickering should first turn off the light, let the bulb cool down if need be and then check to make sure it isn't loose. If the bulb isn't loose, then lights could be flickering for a multitude of reasons. A loose connection can cause flickering, as can an overloaded circuit. Homeowners also may not realize that not all bulbs and dimmer switches are designed to work together. For example, modern LED light bulbs often require the installation of specific dimmer switches or the lights won't operate properly. Flickering can result if these products are not compatible. If a home is old, then flickering lights could be due to old wiring that needs to be replaced.

Daily and weekly cleaning sessions can be a good time for homeowners to perform a quick audit of electrical outlets and lights to ensure everything is safe and working properly.



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# Tips to renovate on a budget

Renovations around the house require an investment of time and often considerable amounts of money. Findings from the 2024 U.S. Houzz & Home Study show that home renovations are becoming more expensive. The median renovation spending for homeowners has gone up 60 percent since 2020. Angi, a home services website, reports the average renovation cost for homes between 1,250 and 1,600 square feet is \$51,772, but the final cost of home renovations depends on the scope of the project.

Homeowners who are conserving funds can rest assured that it is possible to make meaningful changes both inside and outside a home without breaking the bank. Here are some ways to renovate a home on a budget.

## • Create a budget and don't waver.

Figure out exactly what you

can afford for a renovation and then make that your maximum dollars spent. Research comparable projects in your area and be honest about whether you can afford the renovation as-is or if you must adapt ideas to fit your price. Make sure to build in a cushion of around 15 to 20 percent for any unforeseen expenses that may arise once a renovation is underway.

## • Maximize an existing floor plan.

This Old House suggests looking for ways to maximize your current layout before you invest in major renovations like an expansion. Bring in a designer with an eye for utilizing space. For example, see how you might be able to replace shelves with pull-out drawers in the kitchen. Moving furniture around or rethinking floor plans also can help to lower costs.



## • Balance DIY with hiring contractors.

You can save money by tackling some projects yourself, but only if you are confident in your renovation skills. Rather than risk making costly mistakes and having to redo things, hire well-vetted professionals but ask if there's any DIY work you can do to cut costs.

## • Check clearance and resale stores.

Shop discount stores for building materials to save money. For example, if a builder ordered too many cabinets they may offer them to Habitat for Humanity ReStores, which are nonprofit home improvement stores and donation centers. Checking the clearance and markdown sections of other stores may yield considerable savings on items needed for a renovation. Warehouse retailers like Costco or Sam's Club also can be great places to find certain home improvement materials and furnishings.

## • Take advantage of free services.

Certain stores may offer things like free consultations with

designers who can show you what a renovation can look like. This is advantageous to the stores because once you see the potential you're more likely to buy the products, even if it's not mandatory.

• **Resurface instead of redo.** Certain items can be made to look new with minimal effort. Paint is a relatively inexpensive tool that can transform walls and more. A good hardwood flooring company can buff out a floor and put a new coating instead of an entirely new floor. Kitchen cabinets can be resurfaced instead of replaced as well.

Finding ways to perform home renovations on a budget may require some creative thinking, but it's possible to get results at the right price point.



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# 6 features of industrial decor

Home decor is as varied as the people who decorate their homes. Some people prefer traditional styles while others gravitate toward country or coastal. Industrial decor is another unique style that can set homes apart.

The Interior Design Institute says industrial design is known for its raw beauty and functional charm. Industrial design continues to be a popular choice that evolves with each new generation. Industrial design pays homage to warehouses and city centers. For those looking to impart a new look to their homes, industrial chic may be the right fit. The following are six notable characteristics of this unique style.

**1. Neutral colors:** Whites, grays, blacks, and neutral tones of brown feature prominently in industrial design. However, accent colors like red, blue or green also may be used.

**2. Sense of spaciousness:** Industrial design harkens back to vast, open warehouses. Open



floor plans are part of the design, as are tall ceilings and large windows.

**3. Exposed wood or steel beams:** Showing the “bones” of the building is on brand for industrial design. Expect exposed steel or wood beams in the ceilings. Additional exposed structural elements include ducts, brick and pipes.

**4. Recycled elements:** Industrial decor may utilize reclaimed or recycled materials, such as salvaged wood, concrete, pieces of metal, or even stone.

**5. Natural light:** In-

dustrial decor utilizes large windows to let in plenty of natural light. This can counteract the harsher lines of the exposed materials and graphic lines of the style.

**6. Edison bulbs:** Edison bulbs that hang individually or in decorative groups as a chandelier are another common element of industrial design. Metal domes or pendant lights also can be incorporated for a more covered look.

Industrial design is alive and well in the hearts of modern homeowners who enjoy it as a wholly unique design and architectural style.

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